NHS
DIGITAL WEIGHT
MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMME

NHS Digital Weight Management Programme: FAQs for healthcare professionals

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NHS DIGITAL WEIGHT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

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About the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme

1. What is the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme?

The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme offers online access to tier 2 weight management services for people living with obesity who also have a diagnosis of diabetes or hypertension or both. With three levels of support and a choice of Providers, it is designed to offer patients a personalised level of intervention to support them to manage their weight, improve quality of life and improve longer term health outcomes.

The programme will work alongside, and not replace, existing weight management services funded by Local Authorities.

2. What are the aims of the programme?

The programme offers online access to weight management services, to people living with obesity who also have a diagnosis of diabetes or hypertension or both, to support people to manage or reduce their weight, and improve longer term health outcomes.

The programme aims to reduce health inequalities by providing additional human coaching for people with characteristics that suggest they may be less likely to complete behavioural and lifestyle change programmes to reduce and manage their weight. This includes people of younger (working) age, people from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds, men, and people living in more deprived communities.

The programme is designed to complement existing weight management services whilst helping us build the evidence base around the effectiveness of short-term digital weight management interventions.

3. What is the evidence base for digital weight management interventions?

In the context of COVID-19, a digital programme provides a potentially safer and alternative way for people to engage with weight management services and, through low-cost scalability, an opportunity to widen the choice of services available to people.

There is a good evidence base around the effectiveness of behavioural weight management services. Moreover, evidence emerging from the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme suggests that some digital providers can perform as well as face to face services, with benefits in reaching a younger cohort and offering increased flexibility of access.
The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme will gather information on patients, their characteristics and their outcomes, to enable rigorous evaluation of the interventions provided, so that the programme can evolve and improve.

4. Who has been involved in the development of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme?

The service specification for the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme was developed in conjunction with the Tier 2 NHS Obesity Expert Reference Group (OERG) which includes both internationally renowned academic leaders in the field of obesity and weight management along with practising General Practitioners. Led by the National Clinical Director for Diabetes and Obesity, Professor Jonathan Valabhji, the OERG informed and advised the development of the standard specification for each of the intervention levels available as part of the programme.

5. How will this programme help to reduce health inequalities?

Evidence suggests that inequalities exist in access to weight management services. The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme is designed to offer a higher level of support to people with characteristics that suggest they may be less likely to engage with or complete behavioural and lifestyle change programmes. Through the triage system, we hope to ensure that people from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds, younger adults, men and those from more deprived communities are offered additional support and human coaching to complete the weight management programme.

The Referral Hub interface allows a patient to tailor the information through a translation service of their own choice, such as Google Translate, to support alternative language option requirements.

Where possible the providers who deliver services as part of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme have enabled their specific delivery interface to allow for translation services to access their pages and support alternative language option requirements.

Each of the providers who deliver services as part of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme were selected based on their ability to tailor their services towards different community groups. Each of the providers offers selections of recipes which embrace and support differing cultural and culinary needs.

6. What about people who may not be able to use an online programme?

It is recognised that a digital programme will not be accessible by all, nor be the most desirable or effective way for everyone to access weight management services. The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme expands the choice of weight management services for a particular cohort of people and will complement other Local Authority commissioned weight management services.

NHS Digital are currently updating their digital inclusion strategy which the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme aligns with. Through design and delivery, we will continue

to adjust the programme to make these services as person-centred and accessible as possible.

7. Why is there a requirement for comorbidities for the eligibility criteria?

The current NHS Digital Weight Management Programme has been designed in line with the NHS Long Term Plan commitment to provide targeted weight management services for people living with obesity (Body Mass Index (BMI) ≥30kg/m^2, adjusted to 27.5kg/m^2 for people from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds) who also have a diagnosis of diabetes or hypertension or both.

8. Why does the programme use BMI as the main measurement for eligibility?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is an estimate of body weight that considers a person's height and weight. It is calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by the square of their height in metres (weight÷height^2).

BMI is currently the most used measure of whether adults are a healthy weight, or are measured in the underweight, overweight or obesity weight ranges. It is an objective measurement, which is more reliably applied and more practical to assess than other measures.

A BMI between 18.5 and 25 is considered a healthy weight. Individuals with a BMI of 30 and above have been shown to be at greater risk of a range of diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, some cancers, liver and respiratory diseases, as well as the more severe outcomes from COVID-19.

Used on its own, BMI does not identify the level of body fat or provide a full assessment of the health of a person. However, it can be used as a starting point for further discussion with a healthcare professional about a person's health.

9. Why is the NHS paying for this service when there are some people who can afford to pay for weight management services themselves?

Weight management services can provide substantial health benefits to individuals and benefit the NHS in terms of prevention of future disease, which is why we want to make weight management services as accessible as possible to more people.

Obesity is a serious health concern that increases the risks of many other health conditions, including Type 2 Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, joint problems, mental health problems and some cancers.

Furthermore, there is also evidence to suggest that people living with obesity are more likely to be admitted to hospital, intensive care and, sadly, to die from COVID-19 compared to those of a healthy body weight.

COVID-19 has also shone a spotlight on existing health inequalities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that weight management services are not equitably accessed in England. Through NHS commissioning additional digital weight management services, it is our aim to reduce health inequalities by engaging and supporting people with characteristics that suggest they may be less likely to complete behavioural and lifestyle change programmes, by offering them additional support in the form of coaching to complete a programme.

10. What is the Referral Hub?

The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme Referral Hub acts as a single point of contact for all patients, facilitating their triage and allocation to the most appropriate level of intervention within the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme.

The Hub will make it easy for healthcare professionals to refer to the service. Having a single point of referral removes the need for the healthcare professional to discuss provider options with patients.

Patients will receive a text message to access the Referral Hub to select their weight management plan. The Hub will then link to their chosen provider and pass across key information to enable the patient to start for their selected weight management plan.

11. Is data on people with serious mental illness or learning disability being collected by the NHS Digital Weight Management programme?

As part of the minimum data set for the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme, healthcare professionals are requested to provide information on referral as to whether the patient has a learning disability or has been placed on the serious mental illness register.

12. How are patient's weights measured during and after the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme?

All patients will self-report their weight over the 12-weeks of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme. Each patient will be provided with information and guidance by their selected provider to support and promote consistency in the measuring process.

For patients who do not own their own set of scales, advice by providers is given on how to access scales via community pharmacies, sports facilities, friends, and family.

The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme with provide a brief discharge summary for each patient to the referring healthcare professional at the end of the 12-week plan. This will include any reported weight change over the duration of the programme to enable further follow-up to be done.

13. Can you explain more about the three levels of support within the programme?

The programme features three levels of intensity for weight management support and a tailored choice of Providers.

Level 1 – access to digital content only. Intended for people with characteristics suggesting they are less likely to require coaching support and more likely to support their own health and wellbeing.

Level 2 – access to digital content, plus access to a minimum of 50 minutes of human coaching throughout the 12-week programme. Intended for people with characteristics suggesting they may be less likely to successfully complete a weight management programme and who may benefit from additional human coaching to support them to complete the programme.

Level 3 – access to digital content, plus access to a minimum of 100 minutes of human coaching throughout the 12-week programme, and additional features such as supported introduction to the programme, challenges and games. Intended for people with characteristics suggesting they may be less likely to successfully complete a weight management programme and who therefore require a more personalised and supported journey with more intensive human support.

At each of the levels, people will be provided with access to digital content that enables them to work through programmes independently, at a time and place of their choosing.

14. How does the triage system work?

Referral into the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme will be initiated by a healthcare professional to the NHS England & NHS Improvement commissioned front-end 'Referral Hub'. The Referral Hub acts as a single point of contact for all patients, facilitating their triage and allocation to the most appropriate level of intervention within the programme.

The triage system, developed utilising the extensive data and information gathered through the NHS National Diabetes Prevention Programme, provides a weighted score based on identified characteristics that suggest an individual may be less likely to complete a weight management programme (i.e. younger age, people from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds, male gender, and greater deprivation).

At each of the levels, patients will be work through the 12-week plan independently, at a time and place of their choosing.

15. What is the content of the NHS Digital Weight Management plans?

The weight management plan's content delivered by each of our contracted providers alters slightly depending on the provider selected, however there are consistent syllabus themes touch on by each provider these include:

- Understanding weight change
- Nutrition and diet advice
- Mindset and well being
- Creating healthy habits
- Promoting an active lifestyle

Each individual programme supports service users to achieve calorie deficit through healthier balanced diets by increasing their intake of fibre, fruit and vegetables and oily fish and decreasing their intake of saturated fat, sugar and salt, following the current Government guidelines: https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/

Over the 12-week duration of the programme, each individual Provider gives access to materials to support service users to become active on a daily basis, minimise the time they spend being sedentary and ultimately working towards meeting or exceeding the Government physical activity guidelines.

Each Provider App/Web Platform incorporates motivational content, access to a digital peer support group, nutrition, planning activities, cooking advice and recipes combining, where appropriate, differing religious, cultural and health needs, physical activity and general health education.

16. How will this programme be evaluated?

NHS England will collect person-level anonymised data on access, engagement and outcomes on a monthly basis. The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme will be formally evaluated, by an external academic institute to include the medium and long term effectiveness of the Programme, the employed delivery methods and patient experience.

17. How are NHS England managing the risk of people with an eating disorder accessing this service?

In the first instance we will rely on the referring healthcare professional to make a judgement call about who the programme is suitable for.

The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme is not suitable for people with an active eating disorder and this is outlined as part of the exclusion criteria. While appreciating that some with an active eating disorder may be living with overweight or obesity, the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme requires the patient to enter height and weight, and if an individual is considered a healthy weight or underweight, then messaging is shown which explains that the programme is not suitable for them.

We continue to review the programme messaging and resources and will take all feedback into account as part of this.

18. How should healthcare professionals choose between referring into the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme and other commissioned tier 2 weight management services?

The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme is designed to complement, and not replace, existing Local Authority commissioned weight management services. People living with obesity where the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme is inappropriate for their needs or for those without the comorbidities of diabetes or hypertension, will be able to access Local Authority commissioned weight management services.

19. Who are the commercial providers of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme?

Following a national procurement exercise, NHS England have established contracts with 6 commercial weight management Providers to deliver 10 separate programmes as part of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme.

The 10 separate programmes are delivered across three levels of support:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Slimming World	MoreLife Ltd	Liva Healthcare
MoreLife Ltd	Oviva Ltd	Second Nature
Second Nature	Xyla Healthcare	Xyla Healthcare
Xyla Healthcare		

20. Why is the focus of the programme on losing weight rather than changing people's lifestyle habits?

The aim of the 12-week programme is to support a significant population of service users to start behavioural changes to reduce and manage their weight, improve their health status and their quality of life. It is specifically for people living with obesity who also have a diagnosis of diabetes or hypertension or both, to support weight loss in people at highest risk of complications arising from obesity.

21. Will the diet advice be centred around a low carb approach?

All NHS Digital Weight Management Programme commercial providers support service users to achieve calorie deficit in line with current national nutritional guidelines. We are aware of ongoing clinical trials seeking to evaluate the impact of low carbohydrate diets on weight loss and other health outcomes.

22. Is the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme accessible for those with learning difficulties, autism and serious mental illness?

The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme referral hub meets the required level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 (WCAG 2.1). As part of the development programme and to meet the Government Digital Standards the Referral Hub has conducted accessibility audits to ensure it meets the required standards. This process will be repeated as required for any new iterations of the Hub service.

Each of the Providers who deliver comply with the required level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 WCAG 2.1.

It would be up to the referring practitioner to decide if a digital delivery programme was the correct delivery route for the patient as it would be a very individual need.

23. Will people with visual impairments be able to use the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme?

The Referral Hub and subsequent Provider weight management plans are accessible via a responsive webpage and apps that meet the level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 (WCAG 2.1). This means that the programme is suitable for those with a visual impairment or who use screen display software and text readers.

24. Do patients have access to support after the 12-weeks have been completed?

The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme providers are committed to providing ongoing access to the core resources available on the Provider's App and/ or Web Platform to those service users who have completed the 12-week intervention.

There is also an opportunity to ensure, through implementation, that on discharge service users are linked to local resources e.g. social prescribing link workers, staff trained as healthy weight coaches, voluntary sector-based support and services to access ongoing support by the referring practice.

25. What languages are the plan's available in?

The information on the Referral Hub will only be available in English. However, the Hub interface allows a patient to tailor the information through a translation service of their own choice, such as Google Translate to support alternative language option requirements.

Where possible the Providers who deliver services as part of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme have enabled their specific delivery interface to allow for translation services to access their pages and support alternative language option requirements.

The coaching provided at level 2 and level 3 of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme is provided in different languages where possible and as indicated on the individual Provider information page hosted by the Referral Hub.

26. How do the weight management plan's meet different cultural needs?

Each of the Providers who deliver services as part of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme were selected on the their ability to tailor their services towards different community groups.

Each of the Providers offer selections of recipes which embrace and support different cultural and culinary needs. The different cultural needs in relation to exercise have also been considered by each of the Providers and where appropriate, advice and guidance to support these has been tailored.

The Referral Process

1. How should healthcare professionals identify eligible patients?

The NHS Digital Weight Management programme has a clear eligibility criteria. Patients must be aged eighteen years or over, have a BMI ≥ 30kg/m² (adjusted to 27.5kg/m² for people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds) recorded within the last 24 months and have a diagnosis of diabetes or hypertension or both.

Those who are pregnant, or have an active eating disorder, or have had bariatric surgery in the last two years or for whom the referring practitioner feels a weight management programme is considered to pose greater risk of harm than benefit are not eligible for the programme. It would be up to the referring practitioner to decide if a digital programme was the most appropriate delivery route for the patient as it would be a very individual need.

General Practice healthcare professionals can identify eligible participants through practice system searches. A tool that facilitates this search for the eligible population is provided as part of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme referral template downloads (https://www.england.nhs.uk/digital-weight-management/).

Patients living with obesity without the comorbidities required to make them eligible for the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme, should be considered for referral into an alternative weight management service such as those commissioned by the relevant Local Authority.

2. Do patients need to consent to referral into the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme?

It is the responsibility of the referring healthcare professional to ensure the patient is informed about the programme and has consented to a referral being made on their behalf.

3. Can patients be referred to the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme again if they didn't start their 12-week plan?

If a patient was referred into the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme and, for any reason, did not chose a Provider then they can be re-referred at any time and it will be accepted.

4. Can patients be referred to the programme again, if they started the programme but didn't complete the full 12 -weeks?

If a patient was referred into the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme and, for any reason, selected a Provider but did not complete the full 12-week plan, the patient can be re-referred after 24 weeks of when their completion date would be.

If a patient was referred into the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme, chose a Provider but did not start their 12-week plan, they can be re-referred from 6 weeks from the day that they chose their provider.

These timelines and business rules are in place to ensure equitable access to the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme and ensures patients can engage with the programme when they feel ready. If a referral does not meet these criteria, it will be automatically rejected.

5. Can patients be referred to the programme again if they have completed the programme before?

If a patient has completed the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme before, they can be re-referred 24 weeks after their completion date. This is in place to ensure equitable access to the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme. If a referral does not meet these criteria, it will be automatically rejected.

6. Who in a General Practice can make referrals into the NHS Digital Weight Management programme?

Any General Practice healthcare professional, with access to the e-RS system, will be able to refer eligible patients into the programme. This includes:

  - General Practitioners
  - Practice Nurses
- Social Prescribing Link Workers
- Dieticians
- Personalised Care Coordinators
- Practice Pharmacists
- Health and wellbeing coaches
- Healthy weight coaches

Through General Practice referral, we hope to achieve more equitable representation in weight management services of population groups which are often under-represented including people from Black Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds and those from lower socio-economic groups.

7. What if patients are eligible for both this programme and other national or local offers?

Some patients will be eligible for both the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme as well as other nationally commissioned offers e.g. the NHS Low Calorie Diets Pilot programme or the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme and other locally commissioned offers. Healthcare professionals will support patients to choose the intervention which is right for them at the time of referral.

8. When patients are discharged from a tier 3 service, could they access this programme?

Where a patient meets the eligibility criteria and, depending on patient choice, the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme may be an appropriate option for people both before or after accessing tier 3 weight management services.

9. Can local authority lifestyle referral hubs refer into this programme?

We are aware that in some areas access to weight management services is coordinated via local single points of access or lifestyle referral hubs.

We are currently exploring the feasibility of facilitating a referral option into the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme from these local single points of access to complement existing Local Authority commissioned weight management services.